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PETER J. GAMBETTA

Interviewed by Barbara Fetesoff
January 1, 1975

TRANSCRIPT

Tape C30 (Craig 1074)

Peter J. Gambetta

Interviewer: Barbara Petesuff *Petesoff*

Side I

Transcriber: A.G.

P- You say you bought the Alma in ...

G- 1943.

P- And you bought her from.

G- Frank Richards, he was from Petaluma.

P- Did you know anything about his operation of the Alma.

G- Other than he operated the Alma hauling sea shells to Petaluma for the poultry industry.

P- And that's what you bought her for.

G- It was to continue his service to Petaluma for that industry.

P- Do you know why he sold her?

G- He sold her because she was due for a major overhaul in general. The machinery that dredged shells and also the hull needed work, and he was about 76 years of age at the time. So this was a crisis that developed because of that war. So he decided that he would sell it to someone that could utilize it further than he could. So I became aware of it and bought it and operated it as he operated it for one trip. And it was such a laboring procedure to put that cargo aboard as well as remove it from the deck that I immediately

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decided to reengineer the ship and actually doing the work. At that time I owned the Palo Alto Boat Works. I gave a service to the yachtsmen of the Bay area, caring for their yachts. So I took the Alma to that boat shop and reengineered it. It took close to two months to complete all that and then put it back into service. So at that time, while I was doing that, the poultry men at Petaluma were a little bit frantic for sea shells. So in giving the service to Petaluma I would make a weekly trip up there. I would haul up there approximately 110 to 125 tons each, in that cargo. In addition to that, that is, the Alviso Sea-shell Processing Plant, became aware of the fact that I had reengineered the old Alma, and she was able to furnish Petaluma and, in addition, I was then called in to furnish sea-shells to the Bay Shell Company of Alviso. And I did that starting in 1945, and I continued thru the month of May of 1968 steadily, transporting sea-shells for the poultry industry in Alviso. You see the sea-shells that went to Petaluma were for the Petaluma area exclusively, you might say --- which covered Sonoma, Sebastopol, and the surrounding area. So it was a very local requirement. The Bay Shell Company people served the state in general including Hawaii. They shipped sea-shells to Hawaii for the requirements there.

P- Approximately, how many sea-shells did you sell them.

G- The approximate cubic yards of sea-shells that would go into Alviso on a yearly average would be near 20,000 cubic yards.

P- Was this the only service to Petaluma, was anybody else running sea-shells.

G- For a number of years I was the only one going to Petaluma. Then, I believe it was in 1950, so I did it from '44 to about 1950 as the only one going to Petaluma, then a competitor moved in to Petaluma, and he took

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over from there. And I slowly bowed out. Then in '57 or '58 I retired the Alma and I then served Alviso only. I did not return to Petaluma for they did have a source there.

P- Did you build a shell dredger to take the place of the Alma?

G- That is correct. During the period '47 to '57 I built a dredge which replaced the Alma, and I presently have that dredge in my fleet.

P- Do you know the cubic yards that will dredge per minute?

G- Naturally, going into an advanced machine it was aimed to do far more, so it will produce roughly 2 1/2 yards per each minute of washed sea-shells into a cargo, so the dredge and the cargo vessel are separate.

P- How many sea-shells per hour does it dredge.

G- Roughly 200 yards ^{an} hour.

P- And that's the new one.

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G- That is the new one. The old one on the Alma did about 35 or 60 yards per hour only, because it was one unit, whereas the new boat is two units, and it more than doubles, and gets very close to 200 yards, for each hour.

P- What kinds of things had you done up until you bought the Alma in 1943.

G- I'll try to start at the very beginning. I was born just south of San Francisco in the little town of Coleman. My father was a _____ in the large truck gardens that raised vegetables back there in Coleman. So I was brought up as a farm boy, and I came up as a young man living on vegetable gardens because my father farmed continuously for 54 years, after arriving here from Italy, and he arrived here at the age of 17. And he worked here for several years, and then sent for my mother, they were married and started a family of which I am a member. There's four of us, a brother and two sisters.

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And living on one of these ranches, or vegetable gardens, there was access to tools and lumber that was kept for mending ploons that were made of redwood for pouring water to the different plots, so it was wonderful lumber. That is where I was encouraged to build my first successful rowboat at the age of seven. And my brother would help. He was also enthused by the adjoining water that backed up to the acreage where my father farmed. And this was the town of Redwood City. So he was a hunter, my brother liked to hunt, so the waters that backed up to the ranch were marsh lands with many rivers or sloughs, so he would hunt duck. So I was interested in the boating part of it and was more than willing to build the boat, then we'd go rowing. I would row and he would hunt. I remember rowing for days, all day long starting in the early a.m. just before daybreak and rowing all day long. My brother would give me a rest at times, but I would row for hours.

P- Well that was your first boat, how old were you when you built your next boat.

G- Well I built boats continuously.

Mrs. G. - But how old were you when you built that boat you got a lot of money for.

G- I think that was 1936 or 1937.

Mrs. G. - But between the time when you were seven and this how many boats did you build.

G- Numerous boats that were simple capbows and then we would rig them as little slews, and they'd range from ten to sixteen feet, so that was what would be the runner up that I built at the barn. And after I completed that at the boat shop there in Palo Alto, where the boat was locked, why there was an old gentleman there operating that shop, so he offered me employment. So I served as an apprentice due to the fact that he was an advanced boat

builder, and I was coming up through the ranks. So that put me whereby after working for him for nearly two years, why he decided he would just continue in the boat building business, so he made me an offer whereby I could pay him a monthly sum and eventually that shop would be owned by myself, which I took him up on.

Mrs. G. - Yes but prior to serving your apprenticeship you took school, and afterwards then you went and came an apprentice.

G- Well any schooling that related to, that is the reading of blueprints and so forth, and a small degree of engineering to figure out stresses and strengths, so all that was upgraded to me because I kept myself involved, it was natural for me to be involved in anything that related to boats.

Mrs. G. - See you had the education first, then you had the apprenticeship second.

G- Well one relates to the other.

P- I assumed as you went along building your boats you had people to help and guide you.

G- Other than the apprenticeship, yes, and then it was natural for me to be very observing, I was like a sponge, that if ever a boat was being built I would make it a point to stop by and observe and see the techniques and so forth, of which would certainly compliment what I knew already and in some instances it was the case where you might say I was doing a procedure that I didn't agree to, for I felt that some of the procedures that I had developed were better. Then there was the reverse of that, and I would better my procedure by doing someone else's procedure. And I'll add this. A natural craftsman, be it a carpenter or a ship's wright, or whatever, much of that is born in him.

Mrs. G. - Like anything, if you have a beautiful voice you might never make the opera unless you are trained.

G- Well naturally.

Mrs. G. - You cannot do it though without training and education, it's the combination. It sounds like he just went out and tried to build a boat, he didn't. He built a boat when he was seven, he had his love for the water, and learned all he could about it.

P- So then you acquired the shop.

G- Yes, yes, and that was the year 1938 when I acquired the shop. So then I operated there up through 1941.

Mrs. G. * You operated your shop until then, when the government put you out, isn't that so.

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G- As history unfolded, this nation found itself very much in need of vessels to take care of the coastline, and the coast vessels most required were the mine sweepers to take care of any invaders and set in mines. Now I was drafted out of my small shop. It was too small for any government project, and I was brought into San Francisco to one of the yards, Anderson and Christoffini, and they were involved, because they built many boats that were taken from their owners and converted into minesweepers in the very early stages of that war, some few months later the machinery was started to convert them, some were eighty feet long, and made reasonably good minesweepers. While they were being converted on the drawing board were the ones drafted and built from scratch. So they cut the timber that was going in them. In 1942 these yards, also at Folsom and Antioch, made keels. These minesweeps came into being. And that same yard, which is Anderson and Christoffini, they were giving a service to a dredge working on the bay, and they were dredging sea-shells for the chemical industry, and these sea-shells were used in the process of magnesium metals, and that was going into aircraft required for defense.

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So I was dispatched from the yard to the dredge, and the work started at 3:00 a.m. in the morning and finished roughly at noon, at which time I would go to work, and this particular dredge needed much timber for a lot of it had decayed, and they were calling for more production, so I worked there, and that was accomplished while the machine was still in production. It was an emergency or critical situation.

Mrs. G. - And how long did they make you stay there.

G- We lived aboard, almost camped, that is, to be there. And we would stay a week at a time, and that endured for about six months.

Mrs. G. * He had a crew under him.

G- Well I would actually handle the tools also. Because in a procedure of that nature it would be necessary to be there and have the feel of what's going on. And the only way to establish feeling is to become involved in handling the tools and placing timber and so forth.

P- Is this where you got your first oyster shell dredger.

G- Yes, and I became acquainted fundamentally through the machinery of it. For after stepping off of that dredge, I fully understood the procedure and was able to engineer machinery that I placed on to the Alma. Now the reason I came to be somewhat natural to the Alma was the fact that it was being offered for sale and primarily because she was so badly depreciated, and so someone that could buy her and rebuild her and put her to work would have something. It was made known, and word got around, and I ended up being the owner of the Alma, and operating it for many years.

P- How much did you pay for it.

G- I paid 4,000 dollars for it at that time, which was a lot of money. Then I had to rebuild her and that cost maybe 10,000 dollars in all, maybe more. But to be able to operate for all those years, and naturally there was annual maintenance. I had to remove much of her old wood when I bought her

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and replace it with sound new wood. So as I operated the Alma was better in condition as years went on, though she was ageing. And I have to compliment this organization for restoring it to the way I had it years ago. When I went to visit her in Oakland when she was being restored I went down below, and knowing her so well, I noticed they added more wood to what I had added to it. As she floats out there this moment she's a sound vessel. I take it she could pass an inspection by the coast guard with no question at all.

P- Well she has to go out.

G- She is quite a vessel and I experienced no doubt in the navigation of it, in your letter you'd say well how did we come through that one.

Mrs. G. - A half inch off the main?

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G- Well, the free board wasn't, for amidships when we loaded completely that deck would be eight inches below water. It was only the two sheer ends that were showing, and the deck house which was aft, measuring the width of the bulwarks, and then the little trunk cabin was ahead of that. That spelled flotation also, and up in the forward deck the bulwarks was roughly two feet above the shear line, and that would give it some flotation also. But the reason we were down so far when we finished the cargo is that the cargo was being slough skinned by water, therefore we were holding some water on for roughly a half hour, and that would drain off. Then we would come up whereby midships at the shear she was two inches in water, so ten or twelve inches showed and that gave it a fair stability.

P- I have a picture of her, perhaps that would help to give me a better idea of how deep she was in.

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G- This would be the shear line, about here, and we could see the guard following the shear, so when we loaded this would cross about here. The bulwark amidships could be, and then naturally as I described, see this was a washing trowel up here, and shells came through the pump and into the trowel, it revolved with sea water to wash the shells of which they came into a receptical about here, and then it discharged laterally through a shutte off the beam. Under here was the plom that conveyed them into the cargo on both sides, and it was every six feet that we had an opening, and that opening would receive the shells either half on one side and half on the other side.

P- I thought the cargo hold was devided in half.

G- Now the cargo was an area 22 feet wide and 36 feet long, and it had no divider. It was an area just like a room, of which the trunk cabin protruded into because of the engine installation at that time. I think it protruded about thirty inches, and it measured eight feet by twelve feet, so there was that area that protruded into the cargo bin. This is exactly as it was when I completed the engineering and worked it from 1944 up through 1957. And I retired her then.

P- I thought I'd xerox the photo, it's not a very good one, but shows the superstructure there.

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G- Now she no doubt has some cargo on her, I don't know to what extant. Viewing the free board it could be as much as a cargo of at least fifty percent. You see what he did when arriving at Petaluma, he would unload at different stops, and if he was low at two stops he would give one half of a load, and then the other half. So neither one would run out. So that would be perhaps the reasons you see him navigating with a partial load.

P- Could you describe the oyster dredging machinery.

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G- When I bought it from him he had it equiped with a four inch colum to draw the shells off from the Bay bottom. It went into this four inch pump, and it was powered by a four cylinder gasoline engine, and it was called a La Nova. A little four cylinder engine, and all that little engine could do was to operate that pump. Naturally it had to have rinsing water to wash them in the revolving trowel. So there he was using single cylinder stationary gasoline engines. So it was done through that power source, this four cylinder engine and the single cylinder engine to operate these pumps. One wasn't sufficient so he put a second one on, and another pump connected to it, so altogeth^{er} there were two wrench pumps as well as one dredge pump, and they in turn brought the shells into the trowel and released them onto a belt conveyer, which he hung by a mast which stood about fourteen feet above deck. In turn it was equip^{ed} with a gaff, you could not call it a boom. Now this is the mast and you peak it up like a gaff sail, which would be a gaff sail if we were speaking of the type of sail, and from there he suspended this belt conveyor which he would move to distribute the shells, but it would only distribute them in this particular mound, because it did not retract nor did it extend itself. So to complete the loading into the ends of the cargo he then had a little slip scrapper which, in that era, at that time they were drawn by horses and were referred to as a slip scrapper. But in this case he would power it by having a snatch block which he would place at the corners and he would introduce the cable into the snatch block, and the cable was then powered into a little winch which worked off of friction, and he would engage the clutch by a little pull cord which he would tie on his belt. And he would give that a pull, and that would start this little slip scrapper in the direction which he would want to move. And this went on for about ten hours, in the period he was loading it, it would

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load one half.

P- How long did he have it like this.

G- He could have had it or many years, he could have bought it in the mid-twenties. And he had it all those years before I bought it in 1943.

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Mrs. G. - When was it built.

P- It was built in 1881.

GG- Yes, in Fred Seamer's yard, and he built it for his daughter, one of the girls, was it Lester Peterson?

P- No that was Lester Peterson's father, James Peterson.

G- I see, because I knew Lester. So Lester was the off-spring of that marriage.

P- Well actually he was Peterson's son and Seamer's grandson, and he was named after a sister, Alma. That's a nice family tie in. But he said it was very laborious work, and that was one of the reasons why he changed ...

P- O yes, it was ...

Mrs. G. - You took all the engines off.

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G- That cable ¹ took off. And that engine for it was new about two years before I purchased it, so it was the only salvageable piece of machinery there that I could utilize. The pump was worn completely through and I had to rebuild it, and when I rebuilt it I made it into a five inch pump, and the engine I replaced, and these wrench pumps were moved and replaced, so that is where I came into an outstanding investment at that era, because a dollar at that particular time didn't come quite so easy, we were just out of the Depression. And when you talk of thousands of dollars today

you would be talking of tens of thousands of dollars.

P- So that 18,000 dollars you spoke of was a great deal.

G- Yes.

P- Was there another shell dredger at work.

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G- There was one other only and it was primarily employed by the industry for magnesium-metal. You see after the war had ceased, then that dredge no longer had work. So the people there, being acquainted with the Petaluma area, they went to Petaluma and they placed a flat there for processing sea-shells of which it is still there today, the only one in the state. And that dredging firm still operates collecting sea-shells for the poultry industry only. And I myself have not produced poultry shells since 1968. I've done some sea-shells and they have been used as fill or riff-raff on sloping beaches to prevent erosion. On the horizon presently there is interest in using that form of lime, because shells are lime, to aid in the process of sugar, and also to aid in the process of glass. But this is in the future, so I still have the dredger, and I keep it in tack. When sufficient interest is built again I'll go right back into production. I've a marine surveyor to go over it for soundness and so forth, so it is an investment and if you're going to have a boat you must have a standard maintenance program for it, and keep it in good repair. They are wooden hulls and wooden hulls deteriorate, and therefore if you're not supplying a sufficient care to it, you're going to loose the hull to deterioration, because of the elements.

P- When you retired her in '57 you said she was still in good condition?

G- That is correct. I retired her and she laid there for photograph shows ...

So if I remember correctly they bought her about 1959.

P- The records show they moved her out in August of '59.

G- So that's from recollection.

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Mrs. G. - Now the difference in the production was so great that, because you were going out with the Alma everyday ...

G- O yes the ratio was five to one. So as history unfolds everything must be done more efficiently so the result was at that ratio.

Mrs. G.- In other words, he had to make five trips per day with the Alma to cover what the South Bay did in one trip.

P- The South Bay?

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G- That is the name of the present dredge I would be operating if I were in production. The name of it is South Bay.

P- What about the engines aboard her when you bought her.

G- Now the engines that were aboard, one was, and it was the port engine, a medium speed diesel engine, it turned 1200 turns on the crank shaft. It was made by the Atlas Diesel Engine Co., in Oakland. And Frank Regger brought it brand new out of the crate and installed it there, replacing an old gas engine, I believe it could have been a Hicks. They were the popular ones of that era. But he replaced it with a diesel engine in the hope that one day he would replace the starboard side with a mating engine. But as history unfolded he had to replace it all right, but he didn't have money to replace it with a diesel engine, so he bought a lesser expensive gasoline Red Seal or Redwing engine, of which I operated up to 1946 or 47. And I replaced it with a Great Marine which he had one aboard

now.

P- The records say it didn't have new engines until about '25.

G- That would be correct. And at that time I believe she was hauling salt as a barge out of Redwood City, but she would come to Redwood City and they would hand truck over a gangway these sacks of salt, and make a cargo of it and that was towed to where ever it was being processed or delivered.

P- So the salt wasn't in bulk but in sacks.

G- Yes, as a deck cargo.

P- Perhaps this was one of the reasons she kept in such good condition, the salt got into her hull.

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G- Yes. During the period I owned her I would salt her. I'd buy sacks of salt and go below ...

Mrs. G.- Actually she wasn't in good condition whe you bought her, she was a mess.

G- As I replaced what she needed then to avoid further deterioration of what was already there in the original, as well as what I replaced, I salted her down. I would buy sacks of salt, take a dozen men and shove it in the sack and throw it up on the shelf and where ever water had a tendency to seep through. After going through the salt ...

Mrs. G.- What was that other stuff you used.

G- Now in more recent years, I used a petroleum product put out by Standard Oil which is related to Chryosote, but it handles so much easier than chryosote, and it is far more penetrating. It will penetrate into wood far more than chryosote. Chryosote is pressure into timber, they treat timber with it, but this you brush it on and it soaks into timber and protects it from deterioration. That is what I use presently.

P- To get back to the engine, did you know if he originally started with one engine, or ...

G- I believe during his history he had always two engines. Now it could be that originally she may have had one engine, but I recall him revealing that he brought her to the people that built her, and there they put the shackles on for the engine fittings, and they put two in. I remember that distinctly.

P- When he acquired her.

G- Yes.

P- That's interesting because I talked to Roy Peterson, and he said that he finally did that work, he had to bring ...

G- Yes.

86 P- And then about '46 you made changes in the engine room.

G- I made one change, the Atlas remained there for all the years that I had her. It was necessary to work on it from time to time, but it was the nature of an engine that had lots of life to it, it just ran and ran. And it operated all the years that I operated it and I then removed it when this organization bought it I took out both engines. They weren't interested in engines so I removed them.

Mrs. G.- The one engine was there when you bought it from this gentleman.

G- Two engines.

Mrs. G.- But did you replace one engine.

G- That is correct.

Mrs. G.- In other words, the original engine was in there and you kept it all these years.

G- It was a diesel engine.

Mrs. G.- And when you put in the second ...

G- Diseal engine.

P- The Great Marine was it.

G- That was correct. And it was a surplus Marine engine. I removed it from an invasion craft and I put it into the Alma, with the same gear reduction, and though I did put in a propellor which worked far more favorably because of the fact the Alma did not make the headway through water that an invasion craft did so easily, it was recommended to put in another propellor. And that was a three bladed propellor but much greater diameter and far less pitch than the former propellor which I replaced.

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P- Other than the changes you made in the oyster dredging machinery, did you make any changes in the hull.

G- I did. When I bought her she steered difficult, she continually wandered, loaded so heavy that she wouldn't hold her course. The rudder was steady but she would wander, sheer drastically, you would have to fight the rudder and make sure that she would not be out of control or she would go completely out of control. And with that heavy deck cargo she would become severe if you allowed that to happen. It was a cat and mouse game all of the time while you were navigating and watching forward all the time, you ~~watched~~ watched it like a gun barrel so she would not wander. You were on the wheel all the time to avoid these severe jaws. So I kept asking myself, why does she do this. So knowing that when she was on the wane she had a deep four foot, which started right up under the bowsprit and came down, and it went down below the bottom some twelve inches, and it was, it ran back to about 25% of the length of the vessel, and someone increased that fore foot, feeling that they were correcting the problem

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but they actually made it worse. Now I removed it altogether, and that improved it some and then came a twin screw with a simply rudder, the rudder wasn't effective immediately, not in the slip stream of the propellor s some three feet on one side and three feet on the other side, so it was doing its work in a disturbed water condition. The propellors were disturbing that water, the fact that the water was coming from the forward end of he vessel and up the p..

END OF TAPE

Tape C30 (Craig 1074)

Peter J. Gambetta

Interviewer: Barbara Petesuff

Side II

Transcriber: A.G.

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G- I incorporated a theory of my own, and that was, on either side of the rudder I extended horizontally two outriggers, so to speak. Now those outriggers I paneled, a rudder blade there and a rudder blade here, so it formed a tunnel here and a tunnel here. In addition to that there was something, I had three rudders, two tunnels, and there was in motion four wetted surfaces doing the steering, four of them instead of two. You might say six surfaces because the interior of that tunnel was effective. So that proved it to the point, whereby one year I pulled down at the Pacific Dry Docks in Oakland, and they were having trouble with some of those big tug boats. They were twin screw, the same as I, so they saw what I had done. They asked me if it worked. I replied, like a charm. And sure enough all those tugs were equipped with the same application. They just extended horizontal to carry the added two blades on each side of the main rudder, and they corrected their problem too.

Mrs. G.- Is it still there.

G- No, it was removed the year you received the Alma. See afloat these extensions would not show, it was below the water line only. Those tunnels on both sides of the rudder worked to perfection. It made the boat steer beautifully, she no longer wandered, and you could hold the

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wheel and turn your head, that is, if you wanted to view back, and she kept going straight ahead. One thing I did have to watch, she had the length from the rudder to the pilot house was roped. It was a two part line, it came from the wheel, through the shed above me, back to the fastening and cleat. I tightened up on it and secured it. Now in damp weather it would tighten up to the point where you couldn't move it. So we had to go down and release a little slack, and when we felt it ease up that was fine. Still operating without slack though. So that was one of the particular characteristics of the installation. So if you were not aware of it you could be working real hard steering when the line was just too tight. But if you released it a little then it steered well, with ease. You could feel it immediately. Sometimes when we felt we should be leaving the dock we wouldn't bother to slack them, just take off, and then we'd have to go back and loosen them a little.

P- Did you change anything on the superstructure.

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G- The tall mast I removed, and the deck and pilot house remained. The superstructure which included the installation of the machinery was entirely changed. But the hull basically was not changed other than the rudder.

P- Did anybody live aboard her. I know she's got curtains.

G- Now the curtains come about from the fact that when Mr. Resin made his trips he would take his wife along. Now the cargo was taken while trawling at about forty to fifty feet per minute, which is not too fast. And it was done in calm weather, and in breeze weather you would go downwind and his wife did the steering while he worked the machinery, so that is why the curtains, she kept house. You might say, she took care of the

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100
galley. And they did this work together. Now when I acquired it I had to have an assistant, so I would hire a _____. It was myself and a deck hand, that was required to do the work. Now when he arrived in Petaluma to unload that cargo, he would then hire a stevedore or laborers. And there the off hauling was done by means of a ramp that this slip scrapper would go up and when it arrived at the end it would dip down releasing it, and then they would pull it back. And prior to that advancement they did it by what they called a skip basket. It was a square box and they would shuttle it full and it held about a yard, and it had a trick cord at the bottom it would open when it was hoisted and swung over the shore side where the shells would be gathered. But he felt he made great advances when he developed a ramp with a slip scrapper. Well, I never did use it, for prior to making my first trip I equiped the pump to receive a hopper which hung over the side, and through an opening in the hopper there the slip scrapper drug the shells and they fell into this wire basket, of a mesh the shells did not fall out of though the water came in, and into this was inserted the suction pipe to the pump. So the pump, pumped them the second time in through the pipe and through a flexible hose attached to a shoreline, and it went some eight feet inland where the shells were spewed onto a concrete slab, which had a curbing on one side, and it returned the water back to the river by run off. Now on my first trip they made the trip with me, the former owners, and he was amazed at just that feature. It made it so much easier, and thenafter reengineering all of that he made a second dredger. And there he was amazed to the improvement. He spent some ten hours loading it and I would load it in half the time. Sometimes it took our hours if all conditions

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favored quick production.

P- Where did you dredge.

G- I dredged off the shores of _____ Island to Alameda, so I had a choice of dredging off of San Mateo Shoal or off of Paolo Alto. So I had three areas where I dredged.

P- Are these all free shoals.

G- Presently, the state lands commission of the last four to five years feel that they have title to it and they are beginning to claim it. Now it has been revealed for many years that the Oregon Oyster Co., have titles to those lands and they operate a commercial oyster industry up until a point whereby the oyster can no longer propagate. And some statements are made whereby water was not sufficient in quality to sponser it, so there's a big question to this day as to who has title to that source of sea-shells.

Mrs. G.- If we wanted to dredge shells now we would have to go through this process of ...

G- Dealing with the state lands commission.

P- Would you say that resources in shells right now are pretty good.

G- O the supply is fast. For the poultry industry and other horizons there's sufficient shell, I would estimate nearly 100 years. The amount is just fabulous. From some of the core samples of what would be the Bay bottom, penetrating downward, you could go as much as forty feet through the strata, and no one has ever extracted that deep.

P- How far down do you go.

G- We could extract some thirty feet down with no difficulty.

P- When you were dredging you operated the machinery.

G- I was owner, captain and engineer. All I required was a deck hand.

When we would arrive at a sight a deck hand would take the wheel and I would start the machinery and I would see the machinery through the loading operation. Naturally I would do the major portion of the work but with the assistance of a deck hand.

P- So you lived aboard her while you were ...

G- O yes. We had bunks and a galley and what would be required to reasonable comfort.

P- Did you operate the full year.

G- Yes.

P- And during that time you only worked your dredging.

G- Yes.

P- O I listened to a tape the historian made with your brother.

G- Yeah, some years ago I remember my brother mentioned.

P- Well he mentioned a couple of incidents that happened aboard her, one, bumping into the San Mateo Bridge.

G- At that period I had an alternate captain, and this was when we were building the South Bay, and I felt if I could put the alternate captain on and I could stay in and work more on the South Bay, so we could put it on sooner, that is, the volume was greater and the Alma was making more trips to keep up with it, so there the alternate captain made the mistake of coming up on a bridge which wasn't opened, and the bridge had trouble, they weren't able to open, so he decided he would put the helm har over, and put her about and come away, but in doing so the bow cleared but the pilot house didn't clear, it was wiped off. Fortunately they jumped into the shell

bin. They were not injured but they could have lost their lives, both the deck hand and the alternate captain. So that was one of the incidents. That was a mishap. And another one was, when we left on a sunday morning, shells were desperately needed, so I would work on sundays, we left the dock at seven a.m. that morning, the deck hand and I, and we proceeded to dredge shells off the San Mateo shoals and after going thru the San Mateo Bridge we noticed smoke from the vent, which was immediately to the front of the pilot house window, and so you've got trouble, so I went below, and by going below you had to enter the galley, and then in entering the galley immediately you would make the entry to the companionway and engine room. Well, it looked just like a fireplace would look on a christmas morning after the gifts were opened. It was just burning the vigorously. There was only one thing to do, and we kept the CO2 fire extinguishers in the cabin so there was two of them, and I grabed the one and I went down into the engine room and crawled way in and I cut it loose, emptied it, crawled out again, took the second one and repeated this, then closed the companion way doors, sealed them up tight and then vents up above, sealed them down. And at that time it had a forward hatch, it's on the starboard side forward, so I battened it down. There was no air going into the engine room, and we waited six or eight minutes and then I cracked the door open and it was black. So then I said, this isn't the end of this, because that's hot and if oxygen ever hits that it would flare again. So we prepared a number of buckets of water and I started dousing, quickly opening the door, throw it in, and shut the door again. And we kept at it or a half hour until I felt that we had cooled things off. The engines had died for lack of oxygen, so we were adrift

and after cooling it we had no more electrical circuits down below. One bank of batteries which started the fire, and this bank was invaded by a stream of water which came out of a water circuits that was cooling the engines, but a plug blew out and it shot the water on the batteries, and sea water being conductive shorted, just grounded those batteries out to where they exploded, and in doing so they ignited. The sulphuric acid ignited, and that's where this vicious fire originated, then it spread onto the floor boards, oily from the machinery, and they burned very willingly. But fortunately the fire was noticed soon enough whereby the charring of the floor was only surface and the only damage was in the deck house. The carbon there was about a quarter of an inch thick.

Mrs. G.- Tell her about how you got it going again.

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G- So forward end of the dredge was another Great Marine that powered the machinery on that end. And by taking the parts off the Great Marine and putting them down into the hold, which took two hours, we were able to start the one engine in the hold and we were able to get home. Navigating by the South Bay Yacht Club, and some of the membership was there that Sunday afternoon when we returned, and they could see we had no cargo, so they yelled, hey, where's the load. So I yelled, well, the sea-shells weren't running today. And we had a good reason for not having the load.

P- What year was this?

G- It could have been 1955, thereabouts.

P- And that's the only two things that happened.

G- Yes. But in Aberdeen Bay there would be salvage storms that would generate and we would have to take shelter sometimes. We would be bound for Alviso and we could never make it, so we'd pull into Redwood City, and

then when the storm subsided we'd go on. And likewise if it were such that we were destined for Petaluma and the weather was bad, and we always watched the weather in regard to the exposure of the Golden Gate and Berkeley shafts, if the seas were running too heavy there we would pull into Trader Island Cove, drop anchor there and wait. We'd normally wait for the next tide. Sometimes, if the tide was bad, you'd have to wade out five to six hours extra, so we'd wait until the weather was in our favor. You know, I kind of feel an effort to locate some pictures but not knowing exactly what you would need I did not locate them.

P- May I look at the pictures you have to see if I'm not duplicating. The xeroxs are from the Maritime Museum. Some of them are from collections.

TAPE ENDS HERE

Interviewee: Peter J. Gambetta
 Interviewed by: Barbara Fetesoff, January 1, 1975
 Transcription by: Allan Graubard, December, 1977
 Transcription machine: Craig 074

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? indicates the name of a vessel which, on the basis of a preliminary investigation, cannot be verified in standard sources.

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